

RIVERSIDE INN FISHING ACCESS SITE**Montana Board of Land Commissioners****July 2008**

Acquiring Agency:	Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Land Interest:	Fee Purchase
Cost, Funding & Property Characteristics:	Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks proposes to purchase a 3.7-acre property on the Stillwater River near Absarokee for the cost of \$460,000. The property includes over 600 feet of river shoreline, and has a large meadow suitable for 30 parking places. A house on the property (formerly part of the old Riverside Inn) will be retained by FWP for administrative uses and possibly for public recreational rental. Funding for the land purchase will come primarily from the Access Montana program, with additional support from the Fishing Access Site program and the Montana Fish & Wildlife Conservation Trust.
Resource Values:	The Riverside Inn Fishing Access Site will meet the great public demand for a boat launch/takeout site just below the Stillwater-Rosebud Creek confluence. This section of river is extremely popular with floaters and anglers, and a dedicated access is critically needed. The proposed Riverside Inn fishing access site has excellent potential to accommodate the anticipated high use levels in spring and early summer. Acquisition and development of the site will also resolve safety issues and conflicts with local agricultural interests and other residents that have arisen from recreationists parking along the North Stillwater Road and accessing the river from the new bridge.
Process:	FWP Draft Environmental Assessment was released on April 30, 2008, followed by a public hearing in Columbus. About 50 comments were received, with sporting organizations strongly supporting the acquisition and some neighbors expressing concerns over the potential impacts of public use. Decision Notice was issued by FWP on June 24, 2008, recommending purchase of the property and its development as a fishing access site. FWP pledges to address any neighborhood issues that arise with public use of the site. FWP Commission approval is anticipated on June 17, 2008

FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: July 17, 2008

Agenda Item: Riverside Inn Fishing Access Site (R5/Stillwater River)

Division: Parks **Action Needed:** Final Approval

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

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Background: The proposed Riverside Inn Fishing Access Site, located on the Stillwater River two miles north of Absaroka, would meet the great public demand for a boat launch/takeout site just below the Stillwater-Rosebud Creek confluence. Acquisition and development of the site will also resolve safety issues and conflicts with local agricultural interests and other residents that have arisen from recreationists parking along the North Stillwater Road and accessing the river from the new bridge. The Department has negotiated a purchase of this 3.7-acre property for the price of \$460,000. The property includes a modest but functional house (formerly part of the historic Riverside Inn at this site); the remainder of the land is a large meadow that can support ample public parking and related facilities.

Public Involvement Process & Results: The Department released an environmental assessment on April 30, 2008. Public interest was high; the hearing in Columbus drew more than 25 people and about 50 total comments were received (2/3 were in favor of the proposal). Local residents expressed concerns over the potential impacts of public use on the neighborhood, while river users and sporting organizations strongly supported the acquisition. FWP released a decision notice on June 24, endorsing the project as necessary to meet a critical access need and pledging to address any neighborhood issues that arise with public use.

Alternatives and Analysis:

- 1) Approval by the Commission will allow the Department to purchase Riverside Inn FAS and develop it into a fishing access site. The house on the property will be evaluated for potential use for FWP administrative purposes or possibly for seasonal public rental.
- 2) If the Commission does not approve the acquisition, the Department and the public will still be without a dedicated access here; local conflicts can be expected to continue over insecure bridge access, inadequate parking, trespass, litter and a lack of sanitary facilities. FWP is not aware of alternative properties for sale in this section of the Stillwater River.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: FWP recommends that the FWP Commission approve the project in its two components: (1) the Department's purchase of the 3.7-acre Riverside Inn property; and (2) the site development plan for a fishing access site (consisting of about 30 parking spaces, a launch area, vault toilet and signage). FWP ownership and site development will serve the access needs of many hundreds of Montana anglers and other recreational floaters annually. FWP will make a concerted effort (both management and enforcement) to address any potential impacts of site use on neighbors.

Funding Sources: FWP proposes to use Access Montana and FAS funds for the purchase, along with \$25,000 from the Montana Fish & Wildlife Conservation Trust and additional private donations from local kayaking interests. The Department will resolve final the funding allocations prior to closing.

Proposed Motion:

"I move that the Commission authorize the Department to purchase the Riverside Inn Fishing Access Site on the Stillwater River for the cost of \$460,000. I also move that the Commission authorize the Department to undertake site development, as provided for in the Environmental Assessment."



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

2300 Lake Elmo Drive
Billings, MT 59105

NOTICE OF DECISION

Riverside Inn Fishing Access Site
June 24, 2008

TO: Environmental Quality Council
Director's Office, Dept. of Environmental Quality
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks*
Director's Office Lands Section
Parks Division Design & Construction
Fisheries Division Legal Unit
Wildlife Division Regional Supervisors
Mike Volesky, Governor's Office *
Sarah Elliott, Press Agent, Governor's Office*
Maureen Theisen, Governor's Office*
Montana Historical Society, State Preservation Office
Janet Ellis, Montana Audubon Council
Montana Wildlife Federation
Montana State Library
George Ochenski
Montana Environmental Information Center
Wayne Hirst, Montana State Parks Foundation
FWP Commissioners
Montana Parks Association
Bob Raney
DNRC Area Manager, Southern Land Office
Stillwater County Commissioners
Other Local Interested People or Groups
* (Sent electronically)

Ladies and Gentlemen:

A Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) was prepared for acquisition of the Riverside Inn property on the Stillwater River for the purposes of a Fishing Access Site. The draft EA was circulated for 30 days and legal notices were published in the Billings Gazette, the Helena Independent Record, and the MFWP Website. Over 30 individuals attended a public meeting held in Columbus, Montana on May 12, 2008. A synopsis of public comment and our response is attached. Complete public comment is available from FWP upon request.

RIVERSIDE INN FAS ACQUISITION & DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL

EA PUBLIC COMMENT SUMMARY

Public comment period: 4/30-5/30/2008

Public notices placed on state website, published in the Helena Independent Record (5/9/08) and the Billings Gazette (5/4/08, 5/11/08).

Article regarding proposal and meeting; Billings Gazette 5/13/08

Public meeting held; 5/12/08, Columbus, MT 7:00 – 9:00 pm

- 26 individuals signed in at the meeting
- 23 spoke including 5 identifying themselves as landowners, 3 outfitters/guides, 1 local businessperson, 6 groups, 2 public officials
- 14 spoke in favor, 6 of these were representing groups, 3 made suggestions
- 6 spoke in opposition, 3 made suggestions

Numerous telephone calls discussing proposal, primarily with neighbors and Roadhouse Ditch users.

Comments received in writing or via email included;

- 14 identified themselves as landowners including group of 6 Roadhouse ditch water users, 5 groups, 2 local businesspersons, 1 outfitter/guide, 2 public officials
- 15 wrote in support of the project
- 6 wrote in opposition (including ditch group)
- 1 was neutral to project but had suggestion for improving design

RESPONSE TO PUBLIC COMMENTS

IN SUPPORT OF PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

Significant public comment on this proposal expressed support for FWP selecting the preferred alternative (Alternative 'B') because of:

- *the existing parking problems on the north Stillwater road;*
- *it's strategic location below the mouth of Rosebud Creek;*
- *it's contribution to the local economy of adjacent communities;*
- *it's ability to alleviate pressure on other FAS on the Stillwater River;*
- *the problems created for local ranchers and other local residents who use the road on a daily basis, and find parking along the county road to be obstructive at various times during the peak of the recreation season;*
- *Bathroom facilities provided at the site would help alleviate trespass issues and reduce "potty stops" in front of cabins and homes.*

FWP agrees that the Riverside Inn FAS would represent a significant net benefit for many of the above-cited reasons submitted by the public at the Columbus public meeting and through written comments.

FUTURE OF THE PROPERTY IF NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE IS CHOSEN

If the no action alternative is selected, the property will likely be sold to a private individual, with a low likelihood for the public to enjoy access to the river at this location. Stillwater County, FWP, local ranchers and other local residents will continue to struggle with parking issues along

WEED MANAGEMENT

How does FWP plan to address management of weeds to ensure that weeds are not spread to neighboring properties?

Weeds will be managed under the auspices of the FWP Statewide Integrated Noxious Weed Management Plan. The plan guides the agency's annual \$600,000 noxious weed management program including \$34,168.64 in Region Five. FWP's noxious weed management efforts target exotic plant species capable of harming native plant communities and making land unfit for agriculture, forestry, livestock, wildlife, and other beneficial uses. We have a long successful partnership with Stillwater County in weed management on our sites utilizing a combination of contracted chemical spraying and in house resources for integrated weed management. We would continue that on this property.

Currently, the property has limited Canadian thistle distributed on portions of the property. If the Proposed Action is selected, and a successful sale completed, FWP would assess the property for weeds, and initiate an integrated weed management plan. Weed management will involve using techniques that will have minimal impacts to fish and wildlife habitat.

PROPERTY VALUE

The asking price for this property is exceedingly high, and is not a good investment for FWP. When FWP began to work on this acquisition in 2007, the property was listed for sale at a price of \$675,000. In the summer 2007, FWP hired The Appraisal Group of Billings to research and provide a compilation of recent riverfront sales in Stillwater County. The resulting report listed a number of sales of properties with similar characteristics to the Thompson property. Four properties in the size range of 1 to 5 acres on the Stillwater River sold for between \$177,500 (no house) and \$610,000 (high quality house/improvements). All of these sales occurred between August 2006 to June 2007.

FWP also confirmed a nearby sale on the Stillwater River a few miles north of the subject property where a one-acre riverfront property, including a house valued at about \$100,000, sold for \$385,000 in August 2007. This sale seemed to be the most comparable to the Thompson property, except for the additional acreage at the Thompson property (3.7 acres versus 1 acre). This property's list price was \$429,000.

Based on these sales, FWP negotiated a purchase agreement with the Thompson family to buy their land, excluding the house and a 1-acre lot, for the price of \$335,000. When the family subsequently decided not to keep the house, FWP determined that owning the entire property would have significant management benefits, as well as allowing future FWP administrative use of the house itself. As a result, FWP negotiated to purchase the entire property, including the house, for the amount of \$460,000. We believe this purchase price represents a fair market value for the Thompson property, and note that the sale price is 32% below the property's original listed price.

EASEMENT

The access road to the property is a county road. In addition, an exchange of right of way with the adjoining neighbor will remain attached to the property.

TAXES

FWP makes payment in lieu of taxes for Fishing Access Sites.



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

2300 Lake Elmo Drive
Billings, MT 59105

April 30, 2008

TO: Environmental Quality Council
Director's Office, Dept. of Environmental Quality
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks*

Director's Office

Parks Division

Fisheries Division

Wildlife Division

Lands Section

Design & Construction

Legal Unit

Regional Supervisors

Mike Volesky, Governor's Office *

Sarah Elliott, Press Agent, Governor's Office*

Maureen Theisen, Governor's Office*

Montana Historical Society, State Preservation Office

Janet Ellis, Montana Audubon Council

Montana Wildlife Federation

Montana State Library

George Ochenski

Montana Environmental Information Center

Wayne Hirst, Montana State Parks Foundation

FWP Commissioner Shane Colton*

Montana Parks Association/Our Montana (land acquisition projects)

David Moore, DNRC Area Manager, Southern Land Office

County Commissioners

Other Local Interested People or Groups

*(Sent electronically)

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The enclosed draft Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared for the acquisition of 3.74 acres along the Stillwater River north of Absarokee for a new Fishing Access Site (FAS), and is submitted for your consideration. Improvements will include an access road, boat launch, parking, and bathroom facilities. Questions and comments will be accepted until **May 30, 2008**. There will be a Public Meeting on May 12, 2008 at 7:00 pm at the Columbus City Hall Courtroom, 408 E 1st Avenue North in Columbus.

If you have questions or need additional copies of the draft EA, please contact Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) at 247-2940. Please send any written comments by mail to: Doug Habermann at FWP, 2300 Lake Elmo Drive, Billings MT 59105; or by e-mail to dhhabermann@fwp.mt.gov. The draft EA may be viewed on the FWP home page at fwp.mt.gov under recent public notices.

Thank you for your interest,

Gary Hammond
Regional Supervisor

Enclosure

**Draft
Environmental Assessment**

**Riverside Inn Fishing Access Site
Acquisition and Development**

March 2008



***Montana Fish,
Wildlife & Parks***

Environmental Assessment MEPA, NEPA, MCA 23-1-110 CHECKLIST

PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

1. **Type of proposed state action:** Purchase via fee title 3.74 acres of land along the Stillwater River, north of Absarokee, Montana for a new fishing access site. Develop access road, parking, boat launching and bathroom facilities for a day use access site.
2. **Agency authority for the proposed action:**
FWP has the authority to develop outdoor recreational resources in the state per 23-2-101 MCA.

Furthermore, state statute 23-1-110 MCA and ARM 12.2.433 guides public involvement and comment for the improvements at state parks and fishing access sites, which this document provides.

ARM 21.8.602 requires the Department to consider the wishes of users and the public, the capacity of the site for development, environmental impacts, long-range maintenance, protection of natural features and impacts on tourism as these elements relate to development or improvement to fishing access sites or state parks. This document will illuminate the facets of the proposed project in relation to this rule.

3. **Name of project:** Riverside Inn Fishing Access Site Acquisition and Development
4. **Project sponsor:**
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
2300 Lake Elmo Drive
Billings, MT 59105
406-247-2940
5. **Estimated Schedule of Events:**
Environmental Assessment:
Public Comment Period: May, 2008
Decision Notice Published: June, 2008
Acquisition:
FWP Commission Final Approval: June, 2008
State Land Board Approval: June, 2008
Development:
Percentage of Design Completed: 50%
Anticipated Completion of Improvements: Initial – Summer, 2008
6. **Location:**
Stillwater County, T3S R19E, Lot 7 of Section 30 and Lot 1 of Section 31

9. Summary of the proposed action:

Need and Benefits

The Stillwater River has been a popular destination for years for anglers, floaters and other recreationists due to its beautiful whitewater, good fishery and its proximity to the population center of Billings. It also has been developed for summer cabins along many parts of its length, starting in the 1960's. Recently, the pace of development has increased with not just seasonal cabins but also numerous sub-divisions and expansion of the small communities of Absarokee, Fishtail, Luther and Columbus. This change in both land use and recreation demand has increased the need for public access and recreation management along the Stillwater River. Conflicts have occurred between recreationists and residents, with increased pressure on traditional access points with little developed facilities, such as roadsides and bridge crossings.

The location of this proposed action, called Riverside Inn in recognition of the old Riverside Inn, is approximately 1.5 miles north of the City of Absarokee. At this point, the North Stillwater Road leaves State Highway 78, crosses and then parallels the Stillwater River on the north (or west) side upstream to the Johnson and Spring Creek Bridges. The Absaroka FAS, at Johnson Bridge, serves as a popular access point. In 2007, an agreement between FWP, Stillwater County, the Stillwater County Conservation District and a private landowner improved parking and reduced conflicts near Johnson Bridge. Below Johnson Bridge, Rosebud Creek enters the Stillwater, adding substantially to its flows. During a normal water year, floating above the Rosebud is difficult and restricts the ability to enjoy fishing and floating down to the next public access at Whitebird FAS, 7.2 miles below the mouth of the Rosebud and approximately 8.5 miles below Absaroka FAS.

The Montana Department of Transportation (MDOT) replaced the Riverside Bridge in 2004. The location of the new bridge is a short distance upstream from the original bridge's location in order to improve line of sight distances and to widen the county road. (See *Appendix A* for location map.)

The new bridge affected a traditional location for access to the river. At the location of the original bridge, the general public could access the Stillwater River via land next to the bridge's embankments. The design of the new bridge limits access to the river with no parking along the road's margins and difficult physical access along the restricted right-of-way. The old bridge right of way on the north side was abandoned and the south side, although still part of the county road system, now ends at the river. Currently, the general public wanting to fish or float has very limited parking options that can at times cause safety hazards and conflicts with adjacent homeowners when driveways are blocked.

The proposed project by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) to acquire 3.74 acres adjoining the old county road and develop a graveled parking area and vault latrine will eliminate the congestion and safety hazards produced by recreationalists accessing the Stillwater River at the old bridge site. Additionally, the site will provide an intermediate access between FWP Absaroka and Whitebird Fishing Access Sites (FAS), 2.4 miles upstream and 6.1 miles downstream, respectively. The location of the proposed new FAS would accommodate those floaters who want to enjoy a shorter float than traveling the entire distance between the two existing FWP FAS's as well as provide other fishing and floating options up or downstream.

Based on annual visitor statistics for similar fishing access sites along the Stillwater River (i.e. Fireman's Point FAS), it is possible the new Riverside FAS could receive 20,000 visits a year.

Conflicts between neighboring landowners and river recreationalists could continue, and potentially unsafe conditions would persist.

Alternative B: The acquisition of the Riverside Inn property

The acquisition of the acreage adjacent to the Stillwater River will provide the public with an additional recreational site under the management of FWP along this popular river. The site is strategically located below the mouth of Rosebud Creek and between the Absaroka FAS (2.4 miles upstream) and the Whitebird FAS (6.1 miles downstream). This site will provide anglers additional opportunity for bank fishing and an additional put-in or take-out area on the river.

2. AIR Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. **Emission of air pollutants or deterioration of ambient air quality? (Also see 13 (c).)		X				
b. Creation of objectionable odors?			X		yes	2b
c. Alteration of air movement, moisture, or temperature patterns or any change in climate, either locally or regionally?		X				
d. Adverse effects on vegetation, including crops, due to increased emissions of pollutants?		X				
e. ***For P-R/D-J projects, will the project result in any discharge, which will conflict with federal or state air quality regs? (Also see 2a.)		X				

- 2b. Minor and temporary dust and vehicle emissions would be created by construction equipment during the creation of the new parking area, installation of the vault latrine, and the establishment of a new access road.

The location of a vault latrine will be based on the potential of objectionable odors for both neighbors and recreationists. The design is effective at venting and dispersing odors. It will provide a public restroom in a heavily used recreational corridor, reducing the potential for recreationists trespassing or offending residents along the river.

- * Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.
- ** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).
- *** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.
- **** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

4. VEGETATION Will the proposed action result in?	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Changes in the diversity, productivity or abundance of plant species (including trees, shrubs, grass, crops, and aquatic plants)?	X					4a
b. Alteration of a plant community?		X				
c. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				4c
d. Reduction in acreage or productivity of any agricultural land?		X				
e. Establishment or spread of noxious weeds?			X		yes	4e
f. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project affect wetlands, or prime and unique farmland?		X				4f

- 4a. The preliminary concept plan for the development of the FAS does not call for the removal of any of the existing cottonwood trees. However, it may be necessary to remove a limited number of trees when the development effort begins in order to accommodate construction equipment. The overall abundance of plant species on the parcel will not be significantly impacted.
- 4c. A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program's (MNHP) species of concern database found no vascular or non-vascular plants of significance within the boundaries of the property to be acquired.
- 4e. Currently, the property has a limited infestation of spotted knapweed and thistle. The proposed development of the fishing access site and its usage by the public could lead to the additional spread of noxious weeds on the property. If the acquisition and its' subsequent development were approved, FWP would initiate an integrated weed management plan to manage any noxious weeds. This plan would be coordinated with the Stillwater County Weed Supervisor, whom FWP has worked with successfully for many years.
- 4f. There are not designated wetlands or prime farmland to be affected by the proposed acquisition or subsequent development of the FAS (USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Soil Database and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Online Wetland Mapper). A small percentage of the property is classified as Farmland of Statewide Importance, which identifies the location's soil as best suited for food, feed, or forage. This area not likely to be changed by the proposed development since it is limited to the shoreline and the southeastern corner of the property and those areas are not targeted for the locations of any of the improvements.

* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.

** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

*** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

B. HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

6. <u>NOISE/ELECTRICAL EFFECTS</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Increases in existing noise levels?			X		Yes	6a
b. Exposure of people to serve or nuisance noise levels?		X				
c. Creation of electrostatic or electromagnetic effects that could be detrimental to human health or property?		X				
d. Interference with radio or television reception and operation?		X				

- 6a. The will be a increase of noise levels at the site during the construction process and the ambient noise levels are expected to be higher than before the construction due to the area becoming accessible to the public. FWP will take steps to decrease noise heard by the adjacent homes by planting natural barriers (e.g. trees and shrubs) in key locations to deflect sounds from the new parking area and access road. Development will be located away from the site boundaries to provide as much buffer as possible.

7. <u>LAND USE</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Alteration of or interference with the productivity or profitability of the existing land use of an area?		X				
b. Conflicted with a designated natural area or area of unusual scientific or educational importance?		X				
c. Conflict with any existing land use whose presence would constrain or potentially prohibit the proposed action?		X				
d. Adverse effects on or relocation of residences?			X		Yes	7d

- 7a. The establishment of a formal FAS will provide floaters and anglers the opportunity to park away from Hwy 87 and county roads, currently used by those wanting to access the river at this location. This should improve safety and eliminate conflicts when those accessing the river block access to local residences.

As discussed in 6a, some neighbors may hear noises generated by people using the fishing access site for bank fishing and floating activities. Vegetation and fencing will be utilized as necessary to shield neighbors from noise and direct sight of the parking area and vault latrine. Overnight camping will be prohibited to restrict late night use and vehicles will be restricted to graveled roads and parking areas.

Boundary fences including boundary markers will be maintained by FWP to decrease the possibility of trespassing onto adjacent properties.

- * Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.
- ** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).
- *** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.
- **** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

9. COMMUNITY IMPACT Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Alteration of the location, distribution, density, or growth rate of the human population of an area?		X				
b. Alteration of the social structure of a community?		X				
c. Alteration of the level or distribution of employment or community or personal income?		X				
d. Changes in industrial or commercial activity?	X					9d
e. Increased traffic hazards or effects on existing transportation facilities or patterns of movement of people and goods?		X				9e

- 9d. A close neighbor to the proposed FAS has provided access for commercial floats on the Stillwater River as well as other services. Commercial operators may choose to take out their rafts at the FAS; if so they are required to obtain a FWP Commercial Use Permit. This new access point would ensure access for the future for both private and commercial recreationists regardless of other arrangements. Commercial and private recreational use of the Stillwater River adds income to the local communities of Absaroka and Columbus. At least two float outfitters and close to 80 fishing outfitters operated on the Stillwater in 2006.
- 9e. As acknowledged in 7a, currently those wanting to access the river via the county road (North Stillwater Road) park along the road's edge or on the old bridge ROW. Parked cars can cause congestion and periodically block access to neighboring houses. The proposed fishing access site's parking should alleviate congestion along the road and improve local resident safety.

- * Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.
- ** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).
- *** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.
- **** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

** 11. AESTHETICS/RECREATION Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Alteration of any scenic vista or creation of an aesthetically offensive site or effect that is open to public view?		X				
b. Alteration of the aesthetic character of a community or neighborhood?		X				
c. **Alteration of the quality or quantity of recreational/tourism opportunities and settings? (Attach Tourism Report.)		X				11c
d. ***For P-R/D-J, will any designated or proposed wild or scenic rivers, trails or wilderness areas be impacted? (Also see 11a, 11c.)		X				
e. Other:		X				

11c. The public access to this stretch of the Stillwater River will be reestablished so that public safety is ensured and conflicts with neighboring landowners are minimized. See *Appendix D* for Tourism Report.

12. CULTURAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCES Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. **Destruction or alteration of any site, structure or object of prehistoric historic, or paleontological importance?		X				
b. Physical change that would affect unique cultural values?		X				
c. Effects on existing religious or sacred uses of a site or area?		X				
d. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project affect historic or cultural resources? Attach SHPO letter of clearance. (Also see 12.a.)			X		X	
e. Other:						

12d Both the Riverside Inn and Roadside Ditch have been recorded as cultural sites. In addition, cultural resource inventories have been previously conducted in the area. SHPO has been consulted, and an inventory will be completed before any site development takes place.

- * Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.
- ** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).
- *** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.
- **** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

2. Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency:

Final plans and specifications for the project will be developed by FWP engineering staff in consultation with MDOT. All state and federal permits will be obtained by FWP. A private contractor selected through the State's competitive bid process will complete construction. Final inspection will be the responsibility of the FWP Design and Construction Bureau.

State pesticide use laws and regulations will be followed. Application records will be submitted to the Montana Department of Agriculture as required, and these records will be available upon request.

PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

The intention of FWP to acquire 3.74 acres along the Stillwater River north of Absarokee will meet the needs of anglers and floaters for a safe and convenient access point to the river at a new FAS. A dedicated parking area and established raft launch will alleviate congestion and reduce traffic hazards caused by recreationalists parking along the old county road and blocking residential driveways.

Although the proposed development of the site is anticipated to have some minor impacts to the property's vegetation, neighboring residences, and commercial activities on the river, the proposed action (acquisition and development) is expected to have no significant negative cumulative effects on the physical and human environments. When considered over the long-term, this action poses significant positive effects for the public's continuing access to a scenic recreation area of the Stillwater River while decreasing conflicts that exist with those accessing the river under current conditions.

The proposed project was reviewed, and its anticipated impacts were compared with those noted in 23-1-110 MCA (ARM 12-8-601-608) to determine if the improvements would significantly change park or FAS features or use-patterns (e.g. construction of new roads, large excavations, above-ground utilities, shore alterations, etc.). Since this is a new fishing access site, which will change the current use of the property from a grazing pasture to a public parking area with dedicated access point to the river, the physical landscape of the parcel will see significant changes as the proposed improvements are installed and established. To meet the requirements of these rules, public involvement will be executed through the channels outlined in the following section.

PART IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

1. Public Involvement:

The public will be notified in the following manner about the proposed action and alternatives and how to comment on this current EA:

- Two public notices in each of these papers: *Helena Independent Record*, *Billings Gazette*, and *Stillwater County News*;
- One statewide press release;
- Direct mailing to adjacent landowners and interested parties;
- Public notice on the FWP web page: <http://fwp.mt.gov>.

3. Agencies/organizations consulted during preparation of the EA:

Montana Board of Outfitters
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
 Fisheries Division
 Lands Bureau
 Legal Unit
 Parks Division
 Wildlife Division
Montana Department of Commerce – Tourism
Montana Natural Heritage Program – Natural Resources Information System (NRIS)
Montana State Historical Preservation Office
Stillwater County Commissioners
Stillwater County Planning Department

APPENDICES

- A. Map of property to be acquired
- B. Tourism Report – Department of Commerce
- C. Concept Map of Development Plan (separate file)

APPENDIX B

TOURISM REPORT MONTANA ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT (MEPA) & MCA 23-1-110

The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks has initiated the review process as mandated by MCA 23-1-110 and the Montana Environmental Policy Act in its consideration of the project described below. As part of the review process, input and comments are being solicited. Please complete the project name and project description portions and submit this form to:

Carol Crockett, Tourism Development Specialist
Travel Montana-Department of Commerce
301 S. Park Ave.
Helena, MT 59601

Project Name: Riverside Fishing Access Site (FAS) Acquisition and Development

Project Description: To purchase via fee title approximately 3 acres along the Stillwater River approximately 3 miles northeast of Absarokee, Montana for the development of a new fishing access site. The site would be strategically located between the Absarokee FAS 2.4 miles upstream and the Whitebird FAS 6.1 miles downstream. The proposed acquisition and subsequent improvements would replace a public access point along the river, which was lost when the adjacent bridge was replaced a couple of years ago.

The development of the fishing access site would include a vault toilet and establishment of a new access road to a new 20-vehicle parking area. The Riverside FAS would be open for day-use only.

1. Would this site development project have an impact on the tourism economy?

NO

YES

If YES, briefly describe:

As described, the project has the potential to positively impact the tourism and recreation industry.

2. Does this impending improvement alter the quality or quantity of recreation/tourism opportunities and settings?

NO

YES

If YES, briefly describe:

As described, the project would improve the quality and quantity of tourism and recreation opportunities.

Signature

Carol Crockett

Date 1-3-06